



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

### FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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#### BIRD FEEDING TIPS FROM THE U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

As several billion feathered friends head south this winter on their annual migration, many could be arriving hungry in your back yard.

Birds can add a dash of color to the otherwise drab winter landscape, and bird feeding is one way that millions of Americans draw the natural world closer to their homes.

"The Department of the Interior encourages everyone to help conserve our wildlife and natural heritage," says William P. Horn, Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife and Parks. "Bird feeding is a good way to involve yourself in wildlife conservation and, done properly, it can be of tremendous value to both resident and migrating birds."

In fact, more than 62 million Americans -- one-third of the adult population -- feed wild birds each year, according to surveys by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. They spend \$517 million annually to feed the birds.

Birds can be picky eaters, however. Research by the Fish and Wildlife Service has shown that birds prefer certain types of seeds that aren't always commonly available in prepackaged mixes.

The Service offers the following tips on bird feeding to attract the widest selection of winter migrants and offer them the most nutritious fare:

- The two seeds that are preferred by the widest variety of birds are oil (black) sunflower and white proso millet, put out separately. Striped sunflower is moderately popular. Niger (thistle) is favored by a few species such as pine siskins and goldfinches. (Suet will draw woodpeckers and other interesting species.) Common cereal grains (including cracked corn) and other seeds rate considerably lower.

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- You can feed birds year-round; even in mid-summer birds will respond readily to your feeding station. A crucial time to continue your feeding is late winter and early spring--despite the lack of snow cover, birds have a hard time finding a meal then, for most natural food in the wild has already been consumed and summer plant foods have not yet rejuvenated.
- In attracting a variety of birds, how you feed is almost as important as what you feed. Elevated, tubular feeders should be stocked with sunflower to cater to cardinals, blue jays, and chickadees; ground-feeding birds like cowbirds and mourning doves prefer white proso millet placed near to the ground.
- Keep your feeders clean and sheltered from the rain and snow. Sweep or tamp down the snow beneath your feeders to encourage quick consumption of spillage. Using unpopular types of seed will result in an accumulation of waste on the ground, attracting squirrels, rats, and other uninvited guests.
- Try to maintain some unfrozen water in a birdbath or pan for at least part of the day. Songbirds often have a hard time finding a drink when temperatures remain below freezing, and are attracted to an open supply of shallow water, especially in the far north.
- Cat complaints? Bird fanciers can erect large-mesh chicken wire fencing beneath their feeding stations to deter neighborhood pets from stalking birds on the ground, or at least give their feathered friends ample flight time!

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